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On the 16th of November, 250,000 people gathered in Prague on Letná to protest the corruption scandals of the current Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and request either a disentangling of his private business interests from his public office as prime minister, or his demission (and the latter more loudly and vociferously). It was the largest public gathering in the country in the last thirty years, since the Velvet Revolution which brought down the communist government. And indeed, references to the Velvet Revolution were the key guiding theme of the event, starting with the date. The 16th of November is the day prior to a national holiday that remembers the inaugurating manifestations of the Velvet Revolution. Photographs, video streams, and speeches from 1989 greeted the crowds that were streaming on Letná. In typically Czech demeanor the gigantic square started filling up around quarter past two for a manifestation that was scheduled for two pm, rendering many observers nervous whether there was actually going to be anything worth writing about.

The two-hour long programme was highly original, filled with poetry slams, video animations explaining the importance for every citizen to spend moments of time on democracy, farmers driving in on their trucks from across the country to dissuade the image that it is only “the Prague café” who is in opposition to the current government, metaphors of sports games transferred to politics, motivational speeches by ordinary citizens and Charta 77 signatories, readings from famous Czech actors of Timothy Snyder’s “On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century,” and of course, songs, songs pregnant with cultural and historical meaning. The manifestation was unlike any I have seen before, uniquely Czech and filled with cultural referents that were reminding us of our shared imagined community. The originality and quality of the programme is worth highlighting in its own right. It falls in line with a very well developed tradition and highly cultivated skills in theater performances, exhibition installations, the visual arts and film more generally in Czechia. Who would have thought that these staging skills would also make for highly original protest arrangements. Pay attention Europe! And be proud Czechs and your fellow Central European citizens! It matters, at a time when democracy in central Europe is at risk, primarily because many central Europeans feel worthless, dedignified, and second class citizens in Europe, and are, let’s be honest, often made to feel that way by their Western European counterparts. The 16th and the 17th of November are moments when we can be legitimately proud of the imagery we as a nation have created.

With all its symbolism and cultural referents the 16th November manifestation suggests that the period of transition has not come to an end. We are not thirty years apart from the Velvet Revolution; it happened yesterday. Jaroslav Hutka was signing on the stage, as he did thirty years ago. Charta 77 signatories such as bishop Václav Malý and Dana Němcová were giving their speeches. We sang “A Prayer for Marta” (although it was no longer Marta Kubišová signing it), and it brought the crowds to tears as it did in 1989, when they had heard the song for the first time since the Prague spring of 1968.

So yes, thirty years ago was yesterday, but a lot has happened in-between, too. To begin with, this time the manifestations were actually velvet. Police officers were there to show demonstrators the way, and none of them were dressed in riot gear. It didn’t even remotely occur to anyone that violence or vandalism could be a part of the show. On the stage, Jana

Filipová, an ordinary citizen from Pilsen, was talking about her experiences of suing Andrej Babiš, because he falsely claimed that she had been paid for protesting against him, and he refused to apologise for his defamation. She won the court case and obtained a public apology from the Prime Minister. The message was clear, ordinary citizens need to become politically active and do their part. The institutions are there.

The manifestation, and the entire movement behind it, is about a lot more than the demission of the Prime Minister. It is taking our current political leadership as a symptom of a much deeper political malaise, namely, a passive civil society. The goal is to use the momentum and develop an entire programme that will change the political culture of the country. People are encouraged to become politically active and join political parties to make their voices heard, but also to stop perceiving politics as a dirty business. This attitude leads to an ostracization and social exclusion of political leaders. A mechanism of self-selection ensues with those running for public office requiring a particularly thick skin, and perhaps not always exposing the highest moral virtues. Citizens need to counteract these trends. They can get involved in local politics and contribute to creating socially involved communities. Frontier regions and the generation of cross-cultural cohesion is particularly important.¹ Czech diaspora communities have strong cultural affinities to their home country and many want to contribute to its prosperity. Environmental considerations, a care for the Czech landscape, and support for small-scale family farming also matter. And lastly, opposition parties need to develop a culture of collaboration, especially leading up to elections, so that they do not get overrun by evil forces. The programme aims to develop a civil society filled with love, animated by courage, and that values the pursuit of truth. Mikuláš Minář, the key organizer of the movement “million moments for democracy” and its public face, used the metaphor of a gigantic watchdog. Czech civil society should be like a maxidog, “kind, but incredibly big”.

The need for this strong civic movement and an agenda of political cultural change indicates that the transition period has been prematurely declared a success and accomplished, as if EU membership was a panacea. The end of the Cold War brought a massive wave of scholarly interest, political engagement, and financial resources to Central and Eastern Europe. This initial interest has waned, Central Europe is yesterday’s region of interest. Well, developments of the last few years suggest that this attitude comes at Europe’s peril, maybe even at the peril of the international liberal order, if for example, a community of illiberal and populist leaders emerges in Central and Eastern Europe that crosses the EU’s borders.

At the fringes of an academic event I engaged in a conversation with Jane Bennett, during which she told me that she taught a course on Havel and the Velvet Revolution. I should have asked her “Why did you stop?”, and the question is not just addressed to her personally, but why did everybody stop? And yes, Václav Havel was a unique, special figure, and the velvet revolution was a special moment in time, but Havel and the Velvet Revolution were also so profoundly Czech and profoundly central European. Whenever I go back home, I see not just

¹ These points are directly taken out of Karel Müller’s research programme. See for example Müller 2016, 2018.

their legacy, but the deep cultural fabric from which they emerged in my fellow citizens. We need to learn to express our own inherent uniqueness again publicly and let it be an inspiration for the world. The process of being a permanent pupil of Western liberal democracy and market capitalism (and we are clearly excelling at the latter, not so much at the former), has robbed us of our own contribution. The 16th November manifestation has shown what this contribution can look like. Let's build on this momentum. I'm glad the movement "million moments for democracy" is continuing in its efforts and staging more protests.

One of the points raised during the November manifestation was the need for a reform of the educational system to base it less on learning by heart and more on developing freely thinking, creative, culturally informed, and independent human beings with initiative. This journal aims to contribute to these efforts by strengthening the academic sphere in central and eastern Europe, giving it more of a voice on the international stage, and thereby also strengthening its self-esteem. It is also an invitation to scholars from abroad to reflect upon Central and Eastern Europe. And lastly, it aims to introduce scholarship from the world to the region. The aim is to further critical reflection and thought in the academy and beyond in this part of the world that is so dear to us, and thus perhaps contribute our little share to enhancing politically engaged and independent thought in the academy, but with a central European touch. Let's stop imitating and find our own interpretations of what that means, embedded in our cultural background. So how are we faring in this issue?

Marty Manor Mullins zooms in on the Velvet Revolution as it occurred in Košice, an Eastern Slovak town, and thus provides a welcome alternative perspective that looks at the events from the periphery, rather than the centre. The article nicely illustrates beautiful moments of hope for a better future, but also some painful aspects of an event so pregnant with meaning. The reader cannot stop wondering to what extent the dynamics she describes foreshadowed future events in some instances, and missed opportunities in others. For example, Košice initially sided with the Prague based Civic Forum, rather than Bratislava's "Public Against Violence" movement, and only later converted to the latter. One wonders, had these conversions, whether out of conviction or perhaps slight intimidation, not occurred, Slovakia and the Czech lands might not have developed distinct political party systems, and the two countries might not have separated. She also describes the hopes of national minorities, such as the Hungarians, and the Ukrainian and Rusyn minority (and one could add the Roma) for their national and social recognition within the state as a key motivation for joining into the protests. Yet, these aspirations have remained unfulfilled and are to this date not considered a policy priority. And thirdly, she convincingly argues that a whole one fifth of steelworkers joined into the general strike in direct opposition to their economic self-interests, and out of a motivation to live in a more just and truthful society. One wonders, how did this political potential disappear over the years, and why were so many policymakers – domestic and international – unable to tap into it? With its different angle on familiar events the piece raises fascinating questions for future research.

Pinja Lehtonen's article speaks in interesting ways to Mullin's article. Both focus on individual personal choices within a set of possible responses. While Mullins conducted a historical

analysis, Lehtonen discusses the advantages of quantum theory for conceptualizing these individual choices, and, more significantly Q methodology for studying them. The first step in a Q methodology is to identify all the different possible viewpoints on a particular situation using available data gathering methods such as newspaper searches, studies of primary documents, interviews, etc. The next step is to identify 25 to 30 relevant individuals and ask them to evaluate each of these different possible viewpoints on a scale. The researcher's task then is to determine from these evaluations the realm of possible actions. One can see how this research method focuses on studying the present, and perhaps more interestingly, the future, rather than the past. International Relations scholarship typically analyses historical events and patterns to identify trends that will continue into the future. The radical innovation of Q methodology is that it is not concerned about the past, but analyses "collapses in wave functions", i.e. momentary views of relevant participants on a specific topic in order to identify the realm of possible future outcomes. Predictions are impossible, but potentialities can be developed to get a sense of the rationales that enter into decision making processes.

Paul Beaumont suggests that Brexit might well signify an unintended act of martyrdom on the part of the UK that provides a new legitimization narrative for the EU at a time when the EU's original foundational narrative of preventing a bloodbath on the European continent is fading. Although the EU might very well be beneficial for its citizens, he argues, people are not able to adequately perceive the benefits of EU membership due to three distortions: 1) asymmetric communication, which permits national leaders to blame the EU for faults that lie elsewhere, and conversely to take credit for the EU's achievements; 2) an absence of a sufficiently informed citizenry on EU affairs; and 3) Post-Truth and an erosion of trust in expertise. As a result, of these distortions in the information environment sections of citizens might periodically get inclined to leave the EU. A Brexit saga of disastrous consequences can paradoxically become, and already proves to be, a stabilizing force for Europe. The article raises fascinating questions for Central Europe: If we were to disentangle the data, have citizens in Central Europe also become less interested in exiting the EU after witnessing the Brexit episode, as did their Western European counterparts? How have Polish and Hungarian political elites responded to the Brexit drama? How have they adapted their strategies, when on the one hand being in open confrontation with the EU, and on the other hand observing the Brexit debacle? What has been the impact of Brexit in the Czech Political landscape? And Slovakia? Seen from a Central European perspective the article provides a fascinating starting point for new research projects.

The Forum on Multiplicity introduces a debate around international relations theory to the pages of New Perspectives with some of the key protagonists of the discipline contributing their position. Justin Rosenberg has identified one of the key shortcomings of international relations theory, namely that its theoretical approaches barely ever get picked up by other disciplines, while international relations itself is a champion in importing concepts from other disciplines. The second difficulty of IR is that interparadigmatic debate between different approaches has significantly watered down. To remedy these limitations Rosenberg suggests the discipline should rally around the concept of multiplicity, that is around studying the interaction of multiple different societies. The study of multiplicity is the unique contribution IR can make to

the social sciences and humanities more generally. Contributors to the forum discuss the promises and shortcomings of multiplicity as a concept, and whether it has the prospects of indeed becoming a rallying call for the discipline that will uplift IR from its current malaise.

The Forum on the “Imemo Russia and the World: 2019 Forecast,” provides a fascinating conversation between Western and Russian scholars, and perhaps even more interestingly, among Russian scholars, on the 2019 Forecast of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Together with the abridged English language version of the Imemo Forecast, which New Perspectives publishes as well, the Forum could even serve as primary research material on studies of inter- and intra-cultural conversations on Russian foreign policy analysis. Mark Galeotti reads the forecast as primarily narrating two contradictory stories about Russian identity as a foreign policy actor, one of victimhood, and one of leadership. He values the forecast, though, because it provides a window into the Russian foreign policy psyche and can serve as a key step for establishing conversations and dialogue with the West. Cai Wilkinson criticizes the authors of the forecast for conceiving of Russia as a purely passive recipient of a chaotic world order, without being able to attribute any agency to Russia to either contributing to the chaos, or being able to find ways out of it. Alexander Graef focuses on Russian concern about the collapse of the arms control regime, and, similarly to Wilkinson, critiques the Imemo forecast for failing to notice active Russian involvement in that collapse, and instead portraying Russia as a passive victim of it. Paul Robinson takes issue with the alarmist tone in the forecast and suggests, when focusing on longer-term trends the global economic and political order is experiencing a short-term dip in a long-term trajectory of improvement. Russia’s difficulties are rather of a domestic nature he contends. Glenn Diesen criticizes the report for failing to see the opportunities for Russia in the current transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world. Irina Kobrinskaya, as one of the authors of the forecast, defends the forecast against some of the criticisms raised, and elaborates on the context in which it was written to explain some of its key statements. Lastly Dimitry Stefanovich responds to each of the commentaries on the forecast, also in light of having read the full Russian language version of the document, not merely its abridged English language version. His position of a partial insider, yet one with a degree of analytical detachment offers a valuable bridging role between the Western and the Russian perspectives on the Imemo forecast. Perhaps a highlight of this Forum is Stefanovich’s critique of Diesen’s response, which he claims is more hawkish than the majoritarian attitude of the Russian expert community. This critique underlines Stefanovich’s earlier comment that the view in Russia is not unified, but quite diverse. Overall the Forum provides a rare insight perspective into the minds of Russian foreign policy experts, and an opportunity for conversation between Western experts and their Russian counterparts.

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